

ON PAGE 2-A

WASHINGTON TIMES
2 March 1987

GOP leaders pressuring Reagan to jettison Gates

By Mary Belcher
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Reagan should consider withdrawing Robert Gates' name for CIA director because his confirmation chances have been complicated by the Iran-Contra affair, key Republicans said yesterday.

Tower commission member Brent Scowcroft yesterday denied he had been offered the job and said he was "not particularly" interested in heading the agency.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole predicted on NBC-TV the White House will decide early this week whether to withdraw the nomination of Mr. Gates, who has been acting CIA director since William Casey underwent surgery for brain cancer in early December. Mr. Casey resigned as director Feb. 2.

Mr. Dole said GOP congressional leaders discussed the Gates matter with the president Thursday, when the presidential commission led by former Sen. John Tower reported on the Iran-Contra affair.

"We indicated to him [Mr. Reagan] that it [Gates' nomination] could be in some difficulty if there was demand... for a quick vote," Mr. Dole said. "The other side is, I don't think he should be held out there for five or six months until we finish all the committee hearings."

At the White House, a senior official would not say whether the president would withdraw the Gates nomination early this week. "He's still the president's choice for director of central intelligence," said the official, who asked not to be named.

Former Sen. Paul Laxalt said on ABC-TV that Mr. Gates "has the smell of Irangate on him."

"Mr. Gates is a victim of circumstances...

and he'd have great difficulty in getting confirmed," said Mr. Laxalt, a longtime adviser to the president. "I think the administration ought to take a second look."

Mr. Gates faced intense grilling by the Senate Intelligence Committee last month. The panel agreed to postpone a vote on his nomination until the Tower commission released its report.

Mr. Scowcroft said on NBC that Mr. Gates headed the CIA's analytical division — not its operational side — at the inception of the Iran arms shipments. And, Mr. Scowcroft said, "That's the widest gulf in Washington."

Mr. Scowcroft said the Tower commission report questions whether intelligence findings were slanted to support the Iran policy. But, he said, "We merely call attention to that as something that has to be guarded against."

Sen. William Cohen, Maine Republican and vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said on CBS-TV that his panel this week will ask Mr. Gates about whether "political pressure was brought to bear" upon intelligence findings he prepared.

"If that were the case, then I think that Mr. Gates would have a good deal of difficulty being confirmed," Mr. Cohen said.

When the Iran arms initiative began in the summer of 1985, Mr. Gates served as the CIA's deputy intelligence director and chairman of the National Intelligence Council.

Mr. Gates told the Senate Intelligence Committee last month that the agency made mistakes in cooperating with the National Security Council. He said he first learned of a possible diversion of arms sales proceeds to the Nicaraguan resistance in October but dismissed the hints as "speculation" based on "flimsy" evidence.